

Research Article

Impediments to the Emergence of Political Parties in Ukraine

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This article analyses why, after a quarter of century of post-Soviet transition, political parties in Ukraine remain weak. Ukraine's newly elected President Petro Poroshenko and his ally Kyiv City Mayor Vitaliy Klitschko both lead virtual political parties. The weakness of Ukrainian political parties is analysed through five impediments to their development: Soviet political culture; corruption and cynicism; provincial elites; regional and linguistic diversity; and weak party structure. The Soviet legacy has left an ideological wasteland in Eurasia upon which it has proven difficult to build political parties. The absence of pre-Soviet party roots from which to draw makes Eurasia different from the three Baltic States and Eastern Europe, while the late Soviet 'era of stagnation' and rapid, often violent and corrupt drive to a market economy in the 1990s deepened cynicism and corruption. The Soviet legacy of provincialism in non-Russian republics such as Ukraine remains predominant among business and political elites. Regional and linguistic diversity has negatively impacted on the ability of political parties to garner support throughout the country, undermining national integration, as seen during the Eastern Ukrainian violent counter-revolution in Donetsk, home base of the Party of Regions. Ukraine's parties remain structurally weak in their top-down approach and there is an absence of internal democracy, disrespect for voters and reliance on opaque sources of funding.

Keywords: political parties; democratisation; Soviet culture; oligarchs; Ukraine

This article analyses why Ukraine, after nearly a quarter of a century of independence, still does not possess strong and professional political parties. The article surveys the scant literature on political parties and the political system in Ukraine. The issue of weak parties is analysed through five impediments to party development: a Soviet political culture; corruption and cynicism; provincial elites; regional and linguistic diversity; and weak party structure. The first impediment reflects the greater perseverance of Soviet over European legacies, especially among political parties with support bases in eastern and southern Ukraine. The two strongholds of the Party of Regions and Communist Party of Ukraine (KPU) are in Russian-speaking Donetsk and the Crimea, where local populations hold greater allegiance to Soviet than Ukrainian or Russian identities. Voters for both parties uphold greater authoritarian views than even those held by Svoboda (Freedom) nationalist party supporters.

Only one western Ukrainian has led Ukraine: Leonid Kravchuk was the country's first President in 1991–1994. Eastern Ukrainians coming from the highly populated and industrialised cities of Dnipropetrovsk and Kharkiv have traditionally ruled Soviet Ukraine. The KPU and the Party of Regions, both with Donetsk-based strongholds, received first-place plurality in four out of six Ukrainian parliamentary elections: 1998 and 2012 (using a mixed proportional-single mandate election law) and 2006 and 2007 (using a proportional law). The 1994 elections used a full single mandate law, while Our Ukraine received first place plurality

in 2002 when a mixed election law was used. Eastern Ukrainians have won four out of six presidential elections in 1994, 1999, 2004 and 2010. Meanwhile pro-European forces, whose main base of support is in Ukrainian-speaking western and central Ukraine and has received all of the Western assistance given to political parties in Ukraine, have won only one out of six parliamentary in 2002 and two out of six presidential elections in 2004 and 2014.

A report prepared by the Swedish Agency for Development Evaluation (SADEV, 2010) on Swedish-Ukrainian party-to-party cooperation found seven problems, including: (1) weak ideology and policies; (2) corruption; (3) fragmentation of political parties; (4) lack of accountability of politicians and distance from voters who are estranged from the political system; (5) absence of internal democracy; (6) a gap between leaders and youth members; and (7) financial unsustainability. Bader (2010) points to the marginality of Ukrainian political parties that lack social bases, have weak programmes, are excessively dependent on the popularity of leaders and lack long-term viability.

The factors highlighted by SADEV (2010) and Bader (2010) have produced consistently low levels of public trust in political parties, as seen in opinion polls by the Razumkov Centre (2001–2013). Few people join political parties, and the majority of Ukrainians view them as self-serving institutions that are unaccountable and do not respect voters. Not surprisingly, voting levels have progressively declined since the 1990s. The Euro-Maydan in November 2013–February 2014 was distrustful of opposition leaders. Yushchenko's election was met by very high expectations that were never fulfilled, leading to public disenchantment with politicians. Yushchenko therefore never visited the Euro-Maydan.

Ukrainian party development in existing literature

Western scholarly literature on political parties is weak and falls into three categories. The first places analysis of parties within Ukraine's political system, constitution and institutions, especially parliament. The second and most dominant area focuses on parties in terms of regional divisions. The third, and by far the weakest, is discussion of party spectrums (left, centrists, Party of Regions, and 'Orange' and national democrats) and the sources of weak political parties in Ukraine.

Ukraine's parties have been discussed in the context of state-building and emerging state institutions, such as parliament and the presidency, constitutional politics (Wolczuk, 2002; Whitmore, 2004) and parliamentary factions (Herron, 2002). The bulk of the scholarly literature has focused on regime type: for example, the semi-authoritarian political system and its definition by Way (2004) in his extensive and lucid analysis as a 'competitive authoritarian' state. Way (2005a) placed Ukraine's competitive authoritarianism within a comparative context, and Way (2004, 2005b) and Kuzio (2005a, 2005b) analysed the success of the 2004 Orange Revolution as a product of the inability of Ukrainian elites to impose an authoritarian system in a regionally divided country. A more authoritarian attempt to impose an authoritarian regime was attempted by President Viktor Yanukovych, provoking a second democratic revolution – the Euro-Maydan.

Ukraine's regional and linguistic divisions have been extensively analysed by scholars within the context of election outcomes (Clem and Craumer, 2005; O'Loughlin and Bell, 1999), regional elites and interregional conflicts. Such analysis was especially prevalent during the 1990s in the scholarly works of Arel (1995) and Wilson (1997a) after the 1994 presidential elections first showed how Russian-speaking eastern and southern Ukraine and the Crimea

had voted for Leonid Kuchma while Ukrainian-speaking western and central Ukraine had voted for Kravchuk. Fournier (2002) provided one of the most lucid explanations of why Russian-speakers opposed Ukrainianisation.

The extensive focus on regional and linguistic divisions in the 1990s could only focus on the 1994 presidential elections as in 1999 the second round was a contest between two eastern Ukrainians: Kuchma and KPU leader Piotr Symonenko. Incumbent, anti-communist Kuchma received support throughout Ukraine – including in Donetsk, with the backing of state-administrative resources provided by Governor Yanukovych. Scholarly analysis in the 1990s was unable to tie regional and linguistic divisions to political parties because so-called ‘centrists’ only began to emerge in the late 1990s as political ‘roofs’ (*kryshy*) for regional and business clans (Hesli, Reisinger and Miller, 1998; Katchanovski, 2006). In fact, studies of centrist political parties have been practically non-existent with the exception of Protsyk and Wilson (2003).

Although the Party of Regions emerged in 2000 and went on to win three parliamentary elections in 2006, 2007 and 2012 and one presidential election in 2010, Western scholarly interest has been abysmal and confined to Zimmer (2005), Osipan and Osipan (2006) and Zimmer and Haran (2008). The only study of the Party of Regions as Ukraine’s first and only political machine (Kudelia and Kuzio, 2014) was published just as the party disintegrated following the overthrow of Yanukovych in February 2014, Russian occupation of the Crimea and violent separatism in the Donbas (Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts). Zon (2005) is the only scholar to have focused on the political culture of patrimonialism prevalent in the Donbas.

Similarly studies of Ukraine’s left, which at their peak received a combined 40 per cent of the vote, are out of date and remain few in number (Wilson, 1997b, 2002). Studies of national democratic and Orange political forces are far greater, particularly following the rise of Rukh (Ukrainian Popular Movement for Restructuring) in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Kuzio, 2000) and following the Orange Revolution (Flikke, 2008; Gustafsson, 2012; Katchanovski, 2008; Kubicek, 2009; Kudelia, 2007; Kuzio, 2007; Melnykovska, Schweickert and Kostiuhenko, 2011).

The relationship between civic nationalism and the Orange Revolution were largely ignored, except in the case of Kuzio (2010b; 2012c) and Shekhovtsov (2013). Scholarly analysis of nationalist parties in Ukraine have traditionally focused on ethnic Ukrainian ones, thereby ignoring Russian nationalism which has proven to be a major gap in research in the light of the Party of Regions alliance with Russian and pan-Slavic nationalists in the Crimea and Donbas. Ukrainian nationalist parties were largely ignored in the 1990s (Kuzio, 1997) and then scholars over-focused on the rise of the Svoboda nationalist party (Shekhovtsov, 2011).

Western scholarly analysis of the impediments to the emergence of political parties in Ukraine have therefore been inadequate. The remainder of this article will address these inadequacies.

Impediments to political party development in Ukraine

This article discusses five impediments that have prevented the emergence of European political parties in Ukraine. Starting with the first, Ukraine’s Soviet legacy has contributed to ideologically vacuous political parties because pre-Soviet political party legacies (with the exception of in the three Baltic States which are outside the scope of this article) go back too far back in history. Western Ukraine’s last experience of party politics prior to the region’s Soviet annexation in 1939 was of integral nationalist (not democratic) politics. Ukraine and

the post-Soviet world are faced by an ideological void that has been filled by nationalism, populism (Kuzio, 2010a; 2010b), clientalism, and patronage which has manifested itself in ruling parties led by the former senior Soviet *nomenklatura* – Haydar Aliiev (Azerbaijan), Eduard Shevardnadze (Georgia), Islam Karimov (Uzbekistan) and Kravchuk and Kuchma (Ukraine). Populism requires an enemy, whether in the form of Islam, immigration and the EU (as seen during the May 2014 European parliamentary elections) or in Ukraine with the pro-Russian Yanukovych. The fleeing of Yanukovych and the collapse of the Party of Regions has therefore reduced the popularity of Yulia Tymoshenko and her Batkivshchina (Fatherland) party and Svoboda.

The ideological void was deepened by the disintegration of Soviet communist ideology during Leonid Brezhnev's 'era of stagnation' which encouraged corruption and facilitated cynicism. In 1985, when Mikhail Gorbachev became Soviet Communist Party First Secretary, Soviet Ukraine had the largest republican Communist Party with 3.5 million members. Parliament banned the party in Soviet Ukraine in August 1991 during the failed hardline putsch and it was re-registered in October 1993 but then only 150,000 (or less than 5 per cent) re-joined the KPU – a figure that reflected how low the proportion was of Soviet era Communist Party members who had believed in communism (in contrast to those who joined for careerist reasons or were ordered to join).

The ideological void has translated into cynicism and intellectually weak party political programmes that are rarely implemented when politicians come to power, of which the best example is Yushchenko's presidency in 2005–2010. Although the Batkivshchina party is an observer member of the centre-right EPP (European People's Party), it remains as ideologically eclectic as Tymoshenko, who has centre-left views. An interviewer with UDAR (Ukrainian Democratic Alliance for Reforms, also a member of the EPP) leader Vitaliy Klitschko (2013) concluded he 'is improving his rhetoric, but fails to give clear answers to crucial questions regarding the nation's development'. Klitschko's weak political experience was a factor behind him withdrawing in favour of Petro Poroshenko in the May 2014 pre-term presidential election. Arseniy Yatseniuk, who took over the leadership of Batkivshchina after Tymoshenko was jailed in October 2011, has flip-flopped on countless occasions. This led to a credibility problem for voters (Kuzio, 2013) – for instance, he backed a new East Slavic union only three years after he had backed NATO membership as parliamentary speaker. Yatseniuk's 2010 election campaign was unmitigated disaster, encouraging him to agree to become prime minister after the Euro-Maydan revolution and not stand in the 2014 election. Petro Poroshenko, the most popular candidate in the 2014 elections, is an even bigger flip-flopper having moved between countless political forces that have included founding the Party of Regions, becoming a minister in the Nikolai Azarov government, and supporting the Orange Revolution and Euro-Maydan (Kuzio, 2014).

Soviet political culture continues to influence the manner in which Ukrainian domestic and foreign policies are conducted. President Yanukovych and the Party of Regions were at the extreme end of the spectrum in terms of their Soviet and Eurasianist approach to domestic and foreign policy, as vividly witnessed during the Euro-Maydan political crisis when they refused to agree to compromises and used extensive and bloody violence against protesters. Nevertheless, Soviet political culture is also present in all Ukrainian political parties and failure to recognise this fact has led to Western foundations harbouring 'unrealistic expectations' (Bader, 2010). Virtuality in the form of a large disconnect between rhetoric, programmes, policies and actions is common throughout Ukraine's political parties and presidents. There is

also a continuation of the Soviet-era gulf between elites and voters, disrespect of the former towards the latter and absence of accountability of ruling elites to the law or to voters.

Many Ukrainian politicians fail to understand the difference between being in government and opposition, partly because being in power provides access to rents. In 2005–2006, the Socialist Party of Ukraine (SPU) was a member of governments led by Tymoshenko and Our Ukraine leader Yuriy Yekhanurov. Nevertheless, the US Embassy in Ukraine reported, the SPU's 'opposition covered the entire range of Yushchenko's agenda, from economic priorities (WTO), to security policy (NATO), to domestic policy (constitutional reform)' (US Embassy Kyiv, 2006). In summer 2006, the SPU joined with the KPU and the Party of Regions to form an anti-crisis coalition that supported Yanukovich for the position of prime minister. The decision by the SPU to turn away from its Orange allies proved disastrous for the party and was compounded when leader Oleksandr Moroz refused to step down. In Ukraine, political leaders view their parties as their personal property and election failures do not lead to leadership changes (Slomczynski et al., 2008).

The SPU is not alone in seeking to ingratiate itself with Ukraine's only political machine, the Party of Regions (Kudelia and Kuzio, 2014). Our Ukraine and the Bloc of Yulia Tymoshenko (BYuT) both negotiated grand coalitions with the Party of Regions – in 2006 and 2007 in the former case and 2008 and 2009 in the latter. After Yanukovich came to power Yatseniuk offered to bring 40 Our Ukraine-People's Self-Defence (NUNS) deputies into a new pro-presidential coalition (US Embassy Kyiv, 2010).

The SPU and Our Ukraine have both claimed to be in opposition while at the same time being in government. Then Minister for Foreign Affairs and Rukh leader, English-speaking Borys Tarasyuk argued: 'I do not rule out a variant of Our Ukraine in government when they are in opposition.'¹ After the signing of the universal agreement by four out of five parliamentary political forces (Our Ukraine, SPU, KPU, Party of Regions), a fragile and unclear parliamentary coalition lasted only until the end of the year when Our Ukraine withdrew, joining BYuT in opposition to the Yanukovich government.

The provincial nature of Ukrainian political and business elites is an outgrowth of decades of isolation within the Soviet Union and conducting relations with the outside world through Moscow. Kyiv did not receive direct international flights until after it became an independent state. Although the origins of Ukraine's first two presidents (Kravchuk and Kuchma) lie in the Soviet *nomenklatura* elites, Yushchenko is from the rural Sumy region, was trained to be a bookkeeper and began work in a collective farm. Meanwhile, Yanukovich, who spent two terms in prison, is from the coal-mining, working-class Donetsk region, which was a back-water in Soviet Ukraine.

Ukraine's four presidents and the majority of party leaders do not speak or read English, know little about how the outside world works and even pro-Western democratic opposition leaders are not integrated into European and American intellectual networks (Kuzio, 2012a). Yushchenko, although married to a Ukrainian-American, has never deemed it important to learn English. Yatseniuk and Klitschko are the first party political leaders to speak English. Nevertheless, Yatseniuk led a disastrous election campaign in 2010, replete with billboards exhorting voters using Soviet-era slogans (Kuzio, 2009, 2013). In summer 2009, one of Yatseniuk's two oligarch funders, Viktor Pinchuk, changed Ukrainian for Russian political consultants who fashioned Yatseniuk's Soviet style election campaign – much to the dismay of his middle class, post-Soviet voters.

Klitschko's leadership has not been noticeably different to that of other Ukrainian party leaders and UDAR remains a largely virtual party closely tied to its leader (Kuzio, 2012b). A Western consultant who worked on UDAR's 2012 election programme was dismayed to find:

In February 2011, the UDAR party leadership initiated work on a new party programme that would position it as a liberal pro-European political force. They worked closely with German consultants from the CDU (Christian Democratic Union) and advisers from the International Republican Institute (IRI). On the Ukrainian side, they gathered a group of about ten experts from different fields and organised a series of joint discussion sessions to work out different parts of the programme. There were at least five such sessions where experts debated various policy perspectives. Neither Klitschko nor his immediate deputy Vitaliy Kovalchuk participated in any of these sessions or presented their own ideas to experts working on the programme. We were told that Klitschko could not read more than a page at a time. The entire party programme was in effect outsourced to an expert community with minimum feedback from the party leadership. The final programme draft approved during the June 2011 party congress closely resembled the original drafts prepared by each of the experts with the minor corrections more stylistic rather than substantive. The party programme seemed more important to its leaders as a PR instrument rather than as a guideline for policy-making when they would be in power.²

Ukrainian political and business elites are often unwilling to accept outside advice on economic policies (no Ukrainian government has fully fulfilled an International Monetary Fund agreement), habitually ignore European Court of Human Rights rulings and even, after hiring Western election consultants, ignore their advice (Bader, 2010, p. 1099). The 2010 Tymoshenko election campaign hired American political consultants AKPD (who had worked on Barack Obama's first election campaign) but barely listened to their advice. From 2005–2014, the Party of Regions has in fact used the advice of US political consultants more than any other Ukrainian party (Gray, 2013; Leshchenko, 2014).

Ukrainian political parties are structurally weak, lack internal democracy and are run as fiefdoms as seen in the manner in which Moroz, Yushchenko and Tymoshenko ruled the SPU, Our Ukraine and Batkivshchina, respectively. A feeling of ownership of political parties has led to Moroz, Yushchenko and KPU leader Piotr Symonenko refusing to stand down after leading their parties to election defeats. Tymoshenko received a paltry thirteen percent and second place in the 2014 elections, when Poroshenko won in the first round with 55 percent; nevertheless, she will not resign as Batkivshchina party leader. Bader (2010, pp. 1097–1098) believes that many political parties in Ukraine and Georgia who have received Western assistance have not met the criteria of viability and democracy (Bader, 2010, pp. 1097–1098). The Party of Regions was unusual in having three leaders (Azarov, Volodymyr Semynozhenko and Yanukovych) and Brezhnev-era style collective decision making that successfully managed competing groups (Kudelia and Kuzio, 2014).

The opposition does not use the lessons of election defeat to change leadership or undergo internal changes. Following the pro-Western opposition's defeat in 2010 few changes were made for the 2012 parliamentary elections where there was again little transparency or public discussion surrounding the choice of candidates. Only Civic Initiative leader Anatolii Hrytsenko and UDAR leader Klitschko signed agreements to work with the Chesno (Honesty) nongovernmental organisation (NGO), which monitors parliamentary deputies (Leshchenko, 2012). *Ukrayinska Pravda* investigative reporter Serhiy Leshchenko (2012) wrote: 'Personally for me this (United Opposition [Batkivshchina]) list is a personal disappointment. This is not

new politics.' Ukrainian politicians do not know how to renew themselves following election defeats and failed leaders do not resign, which leads to disaffected opponents splitting and creating new political parties (Leshchenko and Nikolayenko, 2012). The seven parties in President Yushchenko's NUNS elected to parliament in September 2007 had grown to 14 by 2010.

Although Italy and Canada also have regional divisions, they have managed to create national parties. Ukraine is divided between eastern regions with what Magocsi (1989) describes as multiple identities (often referred to as 'eastern Slavic' or 'bi-ethnic Russian-Ukrainian') and western regions with mutually exclusive (ethnic Ukrainian) identities. No Ukrainian political party has succeeded in receiving support throughout the country. Ukraine's Orange Revolution and Euro-Maydan led to splits in the country that in the latter case ended in state violence against protesters and violent counter-revolution.

Ukraine's regionalism has prevented a major breakthrough for democratic and reform-minded politicians and has given anti-democratic, counter-revolutionary parties such as the KPU and Party of Regions a high number of votes. Mikhail Saakashvili won 96 per cent in Georgia's 2003 election, while Yushchenko and Tymoshenko received 52 and 44 per cent in the 2004 and 2010 presidential elections, respectively. Yanukovich's and Yushchenko's 2004 election results were exactly the same as those for Kravchuk and Leonid Kuchma a decade earlier (44 and 52 per cent).

Ukraine's post-Soviet transition deepened corruption and cynicism and was accompanied by violence during the 1990s in regions such as the Crimea and Donetsk, where spoils from asset-looting of the former Soviet state were the greatest. Ukraine's four presidents have never found the political will to combat corruption, which has grown over time and infected all aspects of the party political system. Transparency International (2013) ranked Ukraine as one of the most corrupt countries in Eurasia, with only four Central Asian states ranked lower. Corruption reached astronomical proportions during Yanukovich's four-year presidency that bankrupted the country.

Tax declarations by politicians, including President Yanukovich, who allegedly earned US\$2 million each year in 2011 and 2012 from his published works despite them being impossible to find in Ukrainian bookstores, lie within the realm of the theatre of the absurd. Of 450 deputies checked by Chesno NGO, 310 had non-transparent expenditures and incomes; although Party of Regions deputies were the worse culprits, democratic deputies were also opaque (Syumar, 2012). Some candidates in the 2012 elections who claimed they had not earned anything that year nevertheless drove Lexus and Mercedes cars while typically others registered their assets in the names of family members. Only 183 out of 450 deputies had published their income tax declarations as required to by law, including 17 per cent of Party of Regions, 65 per cent of Batkivshchina, 72 per cent of Svoboda and all of the UDAR deputies.³

Corruption continued to be an issue after the Euro-Maydan during Ukraine's 2014 presidential elections. Poroshenko, an old political foe of anti-oligarch Tymosenko, received election support (financing, television coverage) from Dmytro Firtash and the notoriously corrupt gas lobby who had earlier invested in Klitschko (Kuzio, 2012b) as a counterweight to Tymoshenko. Firtash was detained in Vienna in March 2014 over numerous counts of corruption pending his deportation to the US to stand trial (Weiss, 2014). During a visit to Vienna that month, Firtash had convinced Klitschko to drop out of the presidential elections and back Poroshenko.

Yushchenko never instituted reform of the Prosecutor-General's office that he controlled under both the 1996 presidential and 2004 parliamentary constitutions. The Donetsk clan successfully controlled the Prosecutor-General's office from 2002–2014, which permitted them to close criminal cases against their allies, pressure and threaten businessmen to support them, and institute new cases against their opponents. The Prosecutor-General's office had, until the Euro-Maydan, two real as opposed to legislated functions: protect ruling elites and punish dissidents. Both of these functions have nothing to do with European notions of the rule of law.

Political parties are closely tied to business interests, contributing to unequal access to resources and an uneven playing field during elections. Businessmen devote less time to parliamentary work with the Party of Regions, which is the least productive in legislative work, with Batkivshchina and UDAR deputies faring better, but only by a small margin.⁴ 'Piano voting' (voting on behalf of absent deputies) was widespread in parliament, especially (but not only) among the Party of Regions, with many legislative acts adopted without the required number of real votes. On what has been termed 'Black Thursday' (16 January 2014) a range of anti-democratic laws were adopted by the Party of Regions and KPU through an insufficient show of hands (i.e. less than the minimum 226 deputies), rather than using the electronic voting system. Ukraine's imperfect democracy was transformed into a dictatorship in the space of 21 minutes leading to an upsurge of protest and the first murders of protesters.

All (including the KPU) Ukrainian political parties rely upon funding from oligarchs and big business, which deepens close ties between business and politics. Elections in Ukraine are expensive, and presidential and parliamentary candidates spend approximately three times more than they officially declare, while for political parties the levels are even higher (Rudenko, 2012). Sources of funding are opaque, with an absence of legal accountability for false reporting. A ready source of funding exists in the huge shadow economy that accounts for 40–50 per cent of gross domestic product. Little has changed since Liberal Party leader Volodymyr Shcherban made this comment nearly two decades ago: 'Given the current situation, when 60 per cent of the economy is in the shadow, any party organisation obtains shadow financing as well' (Shcherban, 1997). An additional source of opaque party political and election funds are offshore accounts in EU Member States such as Cyprus (Ukraine's largest foreign investor), Switzerland, Monaco, Lichtenstein, the British Virgin Islands and Belize.

The Party of Regions was by far the wealthiest political force in Ukraine, declaring it received US\$40 million in official revenues in 2012 (the figure was undoubtedly far higher) and Batkivshchina and UDAR declaring they had received US\$15 and US\$5 million, respectively.⁵ A new political force, the nationalist Pravyy Sektor (Right Sector) that emerged from nowhere during the Euro-Maydan, was successful in finding 2.5 million hryvni (US\$200,000) to register its leader Dmytro Yarosh as a candidate in the 2014 elections (without the popularity to enter the second round, Yarosh knew he would lose his deposit).

Television channels, especially important during election campaigns, are controlled by the president (State Channel One) or by oligarchs who seek to ingratiate themselves by permitting censorship. The long-delayed proposal to transform State Channel One into a BBC-style societal channel (i.e. no longer a tool of the president as part of his state-administrative resources) only became possible after the Euro-Maydan. Gas tycoon Dmytro Firtash owns the Inter channel, Ukraine's most popular channel, which was vociferous in its condemnation and attacks on the Euro-Maydan (Firtash was though a supporter of pro-Euro-Maydan Porshenko's candidacy). Donetsk oligarch Rinat Akhmetov owns the Ukrayina channel that, like Inter, supported President Yanukovych. Oligarchs Igor Kolomoyskyy owns 1 + 1 channel

while Viktor Pinchuk owns ICTV, New Channel and STB – all of which were more balanced during the Euro-Maydan. Kolomoysky, owner of JN1 (the world's only 24-hour Jewish news channel), was appointed Dnipropetrovsk governor in March 2014 and played a highly positive role in suppressing potential separatist threats and mobilising Jewish-Ukrainians in support of Ukrainian territorial integrity.

Ukraine's weak political parties

On the left, Ukraine looked better in the 1990s when it was the only Eurasian country with a centre-left political party, the SPU, who were invited to join the Socialist International (SI) and courted by the Swedish, German and Dutch social democratic international organisations. The SPU supported anti-presidential protests in 2000–2003 and the 2004 Orange Revolution.

This masked the fact that the SPU suffered from similar problems to other Ukrainian political parties. After the 2006 elections the SPU defected from the Orange coalition to join the Party of Regions-led anti-crisis coalition and government – a step that led to a massive slump in its popularity from which it has never recovered. Although the SPU received a disastrous result in the 2007 pre-term elections, Moroz refused to stand down as leader and the party went into stagnation and marginalisation, receiving less than 1 per cent of the vote in the 2012 elections. A year earlier, the SPU had been expelled from the SI.

Yevhen Korniychuk, who had been First Deputy Justice Minister in the second Tymoshenko government of 2007–2010 was pressured during his three month's imprisonment in winter 2010–2011 to relinquish the leadership of the smaller Social Democratic Party of Ukraine (SDPU). It was re-named 'Forward Ukraine', received financial support from Akhmetov and converted into a Party of Regions satellite party. After failing to enter parliament, Forward Ukraine leader Natalya Korolevska was appointed a cabinet minister. Forward Ukraine, like so many parties launched before it by the authorities and oligarchs (e.g. Winter Crop Generation [KOP] and Rukh for Unity – both in the 2002 elections), was a spoiler party designed to take votes away from democratic parties.

The Green Party of Ukraine (ZPU) was one of the first parties to be launched in Ukraine as an outgrowth of the Green World NGO that arose in protest at the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear accident. The ZPU disappeared in the first half of the 1990s and briefly re-appeared in 1998 when oligarchs used it to enter parliament. The ZPU parliamentary faction only lasted for a brief period of time before the ZPU again disappeared.

The KPU acted more often as a virtual (as opposed to real) opposition party and became a Party of Regions junior satellite in a rather bizarre union of corrupt tycoons and the down-trodden proletariat. In 2000, Donetsk Governor Yanukovich informed President Kuchma that he had provided funding to the KPU – an episode recorded in one of the tapes illicitly made by presidential guard Mykola Melnychenko in the president's office (Wilson, 2005, pp. 158–159; Koshiw, 2013, pp. 212–213). Both the KPU and Party of Regions had Donetsk as their home base and their voters moved between both parties, as seen in the 2012 elections when the KPU more than doubled its vote over 2007. Although supposedly a party of the long-suffering proletariat, the KPU has aligned with the party of fat cats in two parliamentary coalitions and governments in 2006–2007 and 2010–2012 and voted in the same manner as the Party of Regions (including during 'Black Thursday').

In the 1990s, centrist political parties were budding liberal political forces launched by former Komsomol (Communist Youth League) leaders and intellectuals (e.g. Ihor Yukhnovskyy,

Valeriy Khmelko, Volodymyr Hrynyov and Myroslav Popovych) who had emerged from the Democratic Platform in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Typical of these was the PDVU (Party of Democratic Revival of Ukraine), which merged in 1996 with other parties and NGOs to become the NDP (People's Democratic Party).

After Kuchma left office in 2004, pluralism in eastern-southern Ukraine ended after mergers, co-option and marginalisation by the Party of Regions succeeded in establishing a monopoly of power in the region. The last independent centrist political force, *Silna Ukrayina* (Strong Ukraine, formerly the Dnipropetrovsk Labour Ukraine Party) merged with the Party of Regions in March 2012. *Silna Ukrayina* had been led by Serhiy Tihipko who came third in the 2010 elections when he received 13 per cent with support from middle-class professionals and businesspersons. Like many Ukrainian politicians he betrayed his middle-class voters by joining Party of Regions leader and Prime Minister Azarov's government merging *Silna Ukrayina* with the Party of Regions. Tihipko remained loyal to Yanukovych until he fled following the failure of the February 2014 murders to quell the protests.

Democratic political parties have usually been unable to work together; the exception was on one occasion in the 2004 elections. There were seven national democratic and nationalist candidates in the 2014 elections. Unity has been forced upon democratic parties by outside forces – not by internal pressure or the policies of leaders. The 2011–2014 imprisonment of Tymoshenko, which removed competition for Front for Change leader Yatsenyuk, coupled with changes in electoral legislation forbidding the participation of blocs, forced *Batkivshchina*, Front for Change and Reforms and Order parties to merge ahead of the 2012 elections.

The popularity of Our Ukraine and Yushchenko disintegrated in parallel during his presidency and Our Ukraine became a completely marginal force by the 2012 elections in which it received less than 1 per cent of the vote. Its niche was replaced by Klitschko's UDAR, which in 2012 received the same 14 per cent of the vote and third place, respectively, as Our Ukraine and NUNS had in the 2006 and 2007 elections. UDAR attracted the 'pragmatic' wing of national democrats who did not want to work with Tymoshenko. Our Ukraine was replaced by UDAR in the EPP.

In the first half of the 1990s, the Ukrainian Christian Democratic Front (UKhDF) and Christian Democratic Party of Ukraine (KhDPU) were launched in Lviv and Kyiv, respectively, and the latter was invited to join the Christian Democratic International. A third party, the Christian Democratic Union (KhDS), joined Yushchenko's Our Ukraine in the 2002 and 2006 and NUNS in the 2007 elections. By the 1990s the UKhDF had disappeared, and in the 2000s the KhDPU was co-opted by Kyiv Mayor Leonid Chernovetsky, notorious for his corrupt land schemes, while party leader Vitaliy Zhuravskyy was elected to parliament in the Party of Regions in 2007 and 2012. After Yanukovych was elected president, KhDS leader Volodymyr Stretovych defected to the pro-presidential coalition and the party elected Davyd Zhvannya – another defector – its new leader. The KhDS replaced the KhDPU in the Christian Democratic International.

Ukraine's nationalist right was more active and pluralistic in the 1990s when it included the Social National Party of Ukraine (SNPU), Congress of Ukrainian Nationalists (KUN), Federation for State Independence (DSU) and Ukrainian National Assembly-Ukrainian People's Self Defence Force (UNA-UNSO). Of these four, only the SNPU, renamed the *Svoboda* party, remains active and became the first nationalist party to enter parliament in 2012. DSU disintegrated by the late 1990s. One wing of UNA-UNSO was co-opted by the

authorities and renamed 'Bratstvo' (Brotherhood), a second joined BYuT while a third merged with others to launch Pravyi Sektor. KUN, launched in 1992 by the Stepan Bandera wing of the *émigré* Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists, was taken over by the corrupt gas lobby. In 2005, KUN leader Oleksiy Ivchenko was dismissed as head of the state gas company Naftohaz Ukrainy over a scandal involving the purchase of US\$250,000 Mercedes S-Class car with state funds (Amchuk, 2006). The financing of Svoboda is highly opaque and an extensive three-part investigation by the Lviv-based *Ekspres* newspaper found that businessmen who they claimed backed them in fact did not, while some Svoboda leaders undertook corrupt real estate deals with their supposed arch enemy, the Communists (Hroshi Tyahnybok, 2013a; Hroshi Tyahnybok, 2013b; Hroshi Tyahnybok, 2013c). The policy of providing Svoboda with extensive television exposure and organising violent attacks against party members to attract public sympathy was confirmed by former Party of Regions parliamentary deputy Taras Chornovil.⁶

Oligarch funding for Svoboda sought to fulfil two strategies. The first was to take votes from democratic opposition parties in western-central Ukraine because the xenophobic anti-Russian Svoboda could never be a threat to the Party of Regions in eastern-southern Ukraine. The second was to revive Soviet-era denunciations of alleged ties between 'bourgeois nationalist' dissidents with *émigré* Nazi collaborators by using the democratic opposition's cooperation with Svoboda to label them as extremists and 'fascists'. This was clearly evident during nationwide 'anti-fascist' (i.e. anti-opposition) rallies in May 2013 and when Russian and eastern Ukrainian leaders attacked the Euro-Maydan as being dominated by 'anti-Semites' and 'fascists'. Svoboda was thus what Wilson (2005, pp. 19–20) described as a 'scarecrow party' for the purpose of mobilising 'anti-nationalist' Russophone voters that clearly played an important role during the spring 2014 counter-revolution in the Donbas. The active participation of Svoboda and Pravyi Sektor nationalists in the Euro-Maydan, particularly during the violence in January and February 2014, and the participation of Svoboda members in the Yatseniuk government were used by Russian media, which is extensively watched in eastern Ukraine, to claim the Euro-Maydan leadership was dominated by 'fascists' who had come to power during a *coup d'état* and were supported by the West.

Conclusions

Scholarly writing on political parties in Ukraine has not dealt with the deep issues of why they are weak analysed in this article. The May 2014 presidential elections reflected how the absence of strong political parties in Ukraine impairs the country's evolution into a parliamentary democracy. The importance of political parties will grow in Ukraine as it has moved back to a parliamentary system. In addition, strong parliamentary parties are necessary to implement reforms demanded in the Eastern Partnership's Association Agreement and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement. Currently, Ukraine does not possess powerful political parties similar to those that successfully promoted European-mandated reforms in Eastern Europe and Turkey. President Petro Poroshenko and Kyiv city Mayor Klitschko both lead virtual political forces – Solidarity and UDAR, respectively. Leshchenko (2014b) writes 'The very party of Poroshenko Solidarity does not exist. There is no site, the telephone or address is not known to which one can refer to become a member of Solidarity.'

The Soviet legacy in Eurasia has left an ideological wasteland that has made it far more difficult than in post-communist Eastern Europe to establish political parties. Ukraine's virtual political parties have little connection to society and voters, while elites treat their population

as subjects, not citizens, much as they did in Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union. A demand for dignity and a new relationship between citizens and elites was central to both the Orange Revolution and Euro-Maydan.

By the Euro-Maydan, the left had either been co-opted (KPU and Forward Ukraine [SDPU]) or become marginalised (SPU). The centre was monopolised by the Party of Regions. The centre-right had disintegrated (Our Ukraine) and been replaced by UDAR, co-opted by the Party of Regions (KhDPU, KhDS) or forced by external pressure to merge (Batkivshchina, Front for Change and Reforms and Order). Meanwhile, the nationalist right disappeared (DSU, UNA-UNSO) or was taken over by the corrupt gas lobby (KUN). Until the Euro-Maydan, Ukraine had only one electorally successful political machine – Party of Regions – that had never received Western assistance. Following the success of the Euro-Maydan revolution, loss of its two main bases of support (Crimea and Donbas) and the fleeing of Yanukovich from Ukraine and the institution of high level criminal charges against him and his entourage, the Party of Region is in a process of disintegration.

In the May 2014 pre-term presidential elections, seven candidates from the Party of Regions and KPU received a combined vote of less than 10 per cent, reflecting the opening up of a political vacuum in Russian-speaking eastern and southern Ukraine (Yanukovich received 44 and 48 per cent in the 2004 and 2010 elections, respectively). Meanwhile, the decline in popularity of Ukraine's second strongest party was evident when Tymoshenko received second place in the 2014 presidential elections with 13 per cent and Batkivshchina, which together with the Party of Regions had dominated the last three elections, received less than 5 per cent in elections to the Kyiv city council. Two nationalist candidates, Svoboda and Right Sector leaders Oleh Tyahnybok and Dmytro Yarosh, received a combined total of just over 2 per cent.

Western assistance to political parties in Ukraine should take stock of why after two decades of support they have not been successful in establishing strong parties. Three of the five political parties that entered the Ukrainian parliament in the 2012 elections – Party of Regions, KPU and Svoboda – did not receive Western support. Meanwhile, political parties that were targeted with past Western assistance – Rukh, NDP, Reforms and Order, Our Ukraine and SPU – have become marginalised. Accountability in Western democracy-promoting programmes has been weak and providers have not been scrutinised for the ineffectiveness of their programmes (Bader, 2010, p. 1100). For example, the Swedish International Liberal Centre (SILC) with funding from the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) cooperated with the Donetsk-based Party for Public Rule (a virtual political party that scholars working on contemporary Ukraine have never heard of). This has led Bader (2010, p. 1100) to conclude that Western assistance 'has failed to contribute to the development of substantially more democratic, more stable, and more representative parties'.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Henry Hale, Robert Ortung, Serhiy Kudelia and Lucan Way for valuable comments about the issues raised in this article and during workshops on reform in Ukraine held in 2012–2013 under the aegis of the Institute for European, Russian and Eurasian Studies, Elliott School of International Affairs, George Washington University.

Notes

- 1 Borys Tarasyuk, cited in *Ukrayinska Pravda*, 17 July 2006. Available from: <http://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2006/07/17/3130314> [Accessed 17 May 2007].
- 2 Interview with a Western consultant, Washington, DC, 17 April 2013.
- 3 Data obtained from the Centre for Political Studies and Analysis (http://cpsa.org.ua/news/lishe_183_deputati_oprijudnili_svoji_deklaratsiji_pidsumkovij_analiz.chesno [Accessed 18 September 2013]).
- 4 'Portret Rady: Choloviky, Hroshi, Polityka', *Opora* [online], 8 February 2013. Available from: <http://oporaua.org/news/3644-portret-rady-choloviky-groshi-polityka> [Accessed 17 April 2013].
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- 6 Interview with Taras Chornovil. Available from: http://news.liga.net/interview/politics/886016-taras-chornovil_yanukovicha_pugayut_i_timoshenko_i_putin_i_evrosoyuz.htm [Accessed 30 August 2013].

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